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Rptd. Info: Amembassy, TEL AVIV 917
Dhahran for Jenkins.

Middle East News Agency report published US newspapers March 27 states Saudi troops taking up positions outside Aqaba in QTE first move to close Gulf to Israeli shipping UNQTE. Cairo urces quoted as stating Saudi Arabia willing relieve Egypt of task of blockading Gulf.

Department desires ~~xxx~~ information pertaining this report.

For Jenkins: In your discretion, you are authorized ask SAG re report, emphasizing our strong hope Saudi Arabia will take no moves which might increase area tension and hinder work of UN SYG at present delicate time.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR

REVIEWED BY *John* DATE *11/15/87*

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3-2857

Saudi Arabian Troops Move to Block Aqaba

CAIRO, March 27 (UP)—Saudi Arabian troops are moving into positions along the shores of the Gulf of Aqaba in the start of a new Arab move to blockade Israel shipping in the narrow waterway, it was reported today.

Almost simultaneously Syrian troops opened fire on an Israeli settlement at midnight and that marauders from the Gaza Strip ambushed an Israeli truck, seriously wounding one civilian.

The Arab moves sharply increased Middle East tension as UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld ended his Cairo talks and left for New York without solving the future of the Suez Canal or the UN Emergency Force.

NEAR AQABA

The semi-official Middle East News Agency said in Cairo that Saudi troops had taken up positions just outside Jordan's port city of Aqaba in the first move by Saudi Arabia to close the Gulf to Israeli shipping.

The Saudi troops are expected to move into Aqaba proper when British troops stationed there under a now defunct treaty with Jordan move out. That would place the Saudis only a few hundred yards from the Israeli port of Ellat at north end of the Gulf.

Other Saudi troops were reported stationed along the entire coast of the gulf as far as the islands of Tiran and Sinafar which control the entrance to the gulf at the Strait of Tiran.

SUBSTITUTE

The Saudi military moves followed a recent announcement that the nation would take "all measures" to prevent Israeli ships going thru the Gulf to or from Ellat.

Cairo sources said the move indicated Saudi Arabia is willing to relieve Egypt of the task of blockading Israeli shipping since Saudi Arabia has emerged as one of the keystones in American Middle East policy.

The Israeli army spokesman who announced the border incident with Syria said the Syrian troops fired for 20 minutes on the outskirts of the settlement of Dardara in north Israel. He said Israeli troops returned the fire. No casualties were reported.

The other incident occurred late yesterday when marauders opened fire with rifles and machine guns on a truckload of Israelis 36 miles north of Ellat on the road to Beersheba. The driver sped out of the trap and reached safety in the south.